



Office of Institutional Effectiveness

Explorance Blue Pilot Study

June 2016

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**A. Purpose**

In Fall 2016, the current IDEA process will shift from paper and web-based to strictly web-based evaluations. The implementation of the new structure also includes a change in pricing structure from a per evaluation cost to an annual fee. The annual fee will be significantly greater than the yearly total fees paid over the last three years.

Given the pending cost increase, the Professional Development Workgroup (PDW) agreed to evaluate an alternative product. Since e-Campus recently adopted eXplorance Blue and received positive feedback for our online programs, the PDW approved a pilot implementation of eXplorance in Spring 2016.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE) reviewed IDEA and eXplorance Blue to identify similarities and differences. Table 1 provides a cost comparison and characteristic differences are described in Table 2.

*Table 1: Cost Comparison for IDEA and eXplorance Blue*

	<b>FY 2017</b>	<b>FY 2018</b>	<b>FY 2019</b>	<b>FY 2020</b>	<b>FY 2021</b>	<b>Five Year Total</b>
eXplorance Blue	\$24,394	\$37,500	\$37,500	\$37,500	\$37,500	\$174,394
IDEA	\$58,746	\$61,096	\$63,540	\$66,081	\$68,725	\$318,188

*Table 2: Characteristic Comparison for IDEA and eXplorance Blue*

	<b>IDEA</b>	<b>eXplorance Blue</b>
Customizability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standard question set</li> <li>Must use all 47 items</li> <li>Additional instructor questions added outside of the instrument and no analysis available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completely customized to the institution</li> <li>Brief core question set of 11 items</li> <li>Allow instructor to add personalized questions to the instrument and see results in report</li> </ul>
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paper (ends Fall 2016) and electronic</li> <li>Paper evaluations accessed during class only</li> <li>Electronic access through email and blackboard</li> <li>Not mobile friendly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All electronic</li> <li>Electronic access through email and Blackboard</li> <li>Mobile friendly</li> </ul>
Response Rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paper evaluations had higher response rates but paper option not available after Fall 2016</li> <li>Electronic evaluation does not offer real time monitoring of response rate, not available until report is received</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electronic evaluations often have lower response rates than paper</li> <li>Provides faculty access to real-time response rate monitoring so they can encourage student response</li> </ul>
Peer Comparisons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nationwide peer comparisons are available</li> <li>Peer university comparisons are not utilized by most departments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Response comparisons available for University, College, and Department</li> <li>Nationwide peer comparisons not available</li> </ul>
Report Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Available 6-8 weeks after administration</li> <li>Delivered on CD from institutional research</li> <li>Delivered to department representative and then distributed to faculty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reports available within 1 week of final grade entry</li> <li>Delivered through blackboard</li> <li>Delivered directly to faculty and supervisors</li> <li>Accessible from anywhere</li> </ul>

## **B. Method**

### *Recruitment*

OIE sent invitations to Deans and Department chairs requesting volunteer faculty and courses for participation in the pilot. In some cases full departments participated, while other departments asked for faculty volunteers. Some faculty members included all courses in the pilot and others volunteered a selection of their courses. OIE requested that faculty use only one evaluation tool for a particular course, either IDEA or eXplorance, rather than both in order to promote higher completion rates. Participation details are provided below.

- ✓ All colleges participated, with the highest percentage of courses from Business & Technology, Arts & Sciences and Health Sciences
- ✓ 20 departments were represented
- ✓ 108 individual faculty members
- ✓ 287 courses
- ✓ 2,387 students submitted evaluations

### *Instrument Development*

Since eXplorance Blue allows each campus to develop a customized tool, it was necessary to build an instrument for EKU. A faculty workgroup consisting of 11 faculty members and two IR staff was developed and charged with the development of the evaluation instrument. The faculty workgroup convened throughout February and March to develop the core question set (Appendix A) and an optional question bank (Appendix B). The workgroup used validated examples from IU Bloomington and the University of Louisville, as well as the IDEA and e-Campus instruments to guide question development. Due to time constraints, validation procedures were not conducted for the question set developed for the pilot. However, it is possible to implement reliability and validity tests over time and tweak the instrument as necessary.

The core question set was sent to all faculty members with confirmed participation in the pilot study. The faculty workgroup evaluated feedback from the pilot faculty and incorporated that feedback into the core question set or the question bank as appropriate. Final drafts of the core question set and question bank were approved by the faculty workgroup and entered into the eXplorance Blue system by IR staff.

### *Implementation*

All pilot faculty received an email invitation to complete question personalization on April 12<sup>th</sup>. Faculty also received two reminders from the eXplorance Blue system and a personal reminder from OIE about the ability to customize their evaluations. During the question personalization period, faculty could add up to 10 additional questions to the core question set. The additional questions could be chosen from the test bank or completely customized by the faculty member, with a maximum of five customized questions. These limits were established to maintain brevity and encourage completion. More than 60% of pilot evaluations included questions personalized by faculty (N=176 courses).

Students received email invitations to complete the evaluations on April 25<sup>th</sup>. They also received two reminders, April 29<sup>th</sup> and May 4<sup>th</sup>. The email text was drafted and approved by the faculty workgroup with language that was more casual than the formal language typically used in such invitations. Additionally, evaluations were available to students through their Blackboard account. The evaluation module was visible on the homepage at each login to Blackboard after April 25<sup>th</sup>.

Implementation logistics were the responsibility of the OIE and IR offices. An implementation team including members of IT, e-Campus, Blackboard, IR, and OIE met weekly with the eXplorance Blue team to ensure timely completion of tasks and accuracy of data. Additionally, IR and OIE met as needed with the consultant to troubleshoot issues that arose throughout the project.

### C. Response Rates

Response rates are one of the greatest challenges to the use of web-based course evaluations. Paper based surveys have higher response rates because they have a captive audience. Average response rates for paper based IDEA in Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 were 79%, while average rates for online IDEA in Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 were 44% and 39% respectively. Response rates for the e-Campus pilot of eXplorance Blue were 50.75% in Fall 2015.

The overall response rate for the current pilot was 50% (2,387/4,806), with wide variation between departments and courses. Fifteen courses had a 100% response rate with several more over 90%. Response rates can be heavily impacted by faculty, even without incentives. OIE provided a “top ten” list of suggestions to help improve response rates (Appendix C).

*Table 3: Pilot Response Rates by Department*

<b>Department</b>	<b># Invited</b>	<b># Responded</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>
Recreation & Park Admin	8	7	88%
Agriculture	137	108	79%
Honors Program	17	12	71%
Health Promotion & Admin	54	38	70%
Occupational Therapy	970	572	59%
University Programs	7	4	57%
Environ Health & Clinical Lab	86	49	57%
Special Education	81	44	54%
College of Justice & Safety	40	20	50%
Applied Engineering & Tech Mgt	1115	551	49%
Mgt, Mrktng, & Intrntnl Bus	251	119	47%
Psychology	1293	589	46%
Amer Sign Lang & Interptr Educ	143	60	42%
Nursing (Associate)	292	120	41%
College of Health Sciences	53	18	34%
College of Business & Tech	122	41	34%
Fire Protection & Paramed Sci	46	15	33%
Graduate School	7	2	29%
Curriculum and Instruction	57	15	26%
Medical Laboratory Science	27	3	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4806</b>	<b>2387</b>	<b>50%</b>

**D. Reports**

University, College, Department, and Instructor reports were designed by OIE using the eXplorance Blue report builder. Faculty and Administrative Assistants received instructor reports, while Department Chairs received a less detailed version of the individual instructor reports for their departments. Deans and Department Chairs received Department, College, and University reports. Invitations to view reports were sent via email and accessible through Blackboard.

Turnaround time for reports was less than one week. Grades posted Monday, May 16<sup>th</sup> and report notifications were sent Thursday, May 19<sup>th</sup>. In comparison, IR received CDs with IDEA results on June 15<sup>th</sup> and are working on distributing those to the administrative assistants, who will then share them with faculty.

The University report is provided for reference in Appendix D.

**E. Faculty Feedback**

One week after reports were delivered, pilot faculty were asked to participate in a survey regarding their experience using eXplorance Blue. Thirty-three faculty responded to the survey, for a 31% response rate. Overall, faculty feedback was positive. As shown in Table 4, the majority of faculty reported their experience with eXplorance was the same or better than that with IDEA in all areas. The lowest rated items were student accessibility, format and layout of reports, and response rates. There was some confusion about students’ ability to access the evaluation through Blackboard. This problem can be remedied with stronger communication regarding the process. As for the format and layout of reports, we received detailed feedback from some faculty about what they liked and what they found confusing. We can use this feedback to improve reports in the future.

*Table 4: IDEA vs eXplorance Blue Experience*

For the following characteristics, please evaluate your eXplorance Blue Pilot experience and compare it to IDEA	Worse	Same	Better	Total Responses	Average Score
Timeliness of reports	3%	6%	90%	31	4.55
Monitoring of response rates	3%	17%	80%	30	4.3
Accessibility to reports	0%	23%	77%	31	4.39
Ease of use	3%	32%	65%	31	3.94
Format and layout of reports	19%	19%	61%	31	3.71
Useful for informing changes to course	3%	39%	58%	31	3.68
Useful for informing changes to teaching strategies	6%	39%	55%	31	3.61
Student accessibility	19%	32%	48%	31	3.55
Availability of support	6%	58%	35%	31	3.39
Response rates	42%	32%	26%	31	2.77

As shown in Table 5, the question personalization process received mixed reviews. Although most faculty rated their experience “Good” for all but two items, there is certainly room for improvement in this area. Again, more specific feedback in the comments section will guide the improvement of this process, including availability and helpfulness of support.

*Table 5. Question Personalization Experience*

Please evaluate your Question Personalization experience.	Bad	Neutral	Good	Total Responses	Average Score
Sufficient number of customized questions	20%	5%	75%	20	3.8
Appropriate question bank items	20%	10%	70%	20	3.6
Sufficient question bank items	15%	20%	65%	20	3.65
Sufficient types of customized questions	30%	5%	65%	20	3.55
Ease of use	15%	25%	60%	20	3.85
Usefulness of instructions	10%	35%	55%	20	3.7
Availability of support	5%	50%	45%	20	3.65
Helpfulness of support	5%	55%	40%	20	3.6

Table 6 shows that the majority of faculty respondents 87% indicated that they would support a move to eXplorance Blue. Comments indicate that several respondents would prefer to maintain a paper-based, in-class option for evaluations. As stated previously, IDEA will no longer support paper-based evaluations in Fall 2016.

*Table 6: Support for Move to eXplorance Blue*

How likely would you be to support EKU's move to eXplorance Blue for surveying students about their courses?	Unlikely	Likely	Total
Number	4	26	30
Percent	13%	87%	-

Finally, a few faculty respondents provided additional comments in the open ended portion of the survey. Comments fell into one of five categories: Reports, Logistics (how students receive link, how to view the evaluation), response rates, customizability of questions in the Question Personalization process, and Other.

As stated previously, several of comments regarding reports, questions, and logistics were very detailed and will be useful in revising and improving the process moving forward. Specifically, the comments will help make reports more useful and guide better communication with faculty about the process. Comments regarding response rates were primarily aimed at the loss of response rates due to the implementation of a web-based tool and a preference for paper-based evaluations. An increased emphasis on the mobile friendly nature of eXplorance Blue and the possibility of providing class time for students to complete the evaluation on their phones or other mobile devices may address some of these concerns.

**F. Next Steps**

In order to maintain the current pricing commitment from eXplorance Blue, a decision must be made by July 12, 2016. If the decision is to move forward, many steps regarding data preparation must be completed prior to the start of the Fall 2016 semester. Additionally, a stronger communication plan for faculty must be developed to address concerns voiced in the faculty survey. Finally, OIE will work with faculty to improve the questions and the question personalization process.

## Appendix A: Core Question Set

1. Overall, I rate this instructor as... (Scale 1-5, poor to excellent)
2. The overall quality of this course was... (Scale 1-5, poor to excellent)
3. Course activities and materials such as lectures, assignments, reading, videos, discussion, etc. supported the learning goals of this course. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
4. The instructor was available to provide help if requested (in person, by email, office hours, etc). (Scale 1-5, Agreement, non-applicable option)
5. Instructor provided feedback on my performance. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
6. The instructor encouraged my interest in the course subject matter. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
7. My knowledge of the course topic has increased as a result of taking this course. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
8. I strengthened skills such as critical thinking, writing, communication, technical abilities, etc. as a result of taking this course. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
9. What did you like most about this course and instructor?
10. What did you like least about this course and instructor?
11. What recommendations do you have for improving this course?

## Appendix B: Optional Test Bank Questions

### A. Course Questions

- Course objectives were clear. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- Course objectives were met. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- Class time was used effectively to help me learn. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- Tests reflect course content. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- Out-of-class work (assignments, readings, practice) helped me learn. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- Compared to other courses you've taken how much time did this course require? (much more time, more time, about as much time, less time, much less time)
- In a typical week, about how much time did you devote to this course? (Do not count scheduled class time, labs, etc.) (less than one hour, 1-2 hours, 3-4 hours, 5-6 hours, 7-8 hours, 9-10 hours 11-15 hours, more than 15 hours)
- The course text(s) and/or readings were useful. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- Course used technology and multimedia effectively to promote student learning. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- Course used technology and multimedia in a manner that was accessible to me. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- Course included examples and assignments related to real world issues. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- This course improved my creative thinking skills. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- This course improved my critical thinking skills. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- This course improved my communication skills. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- This course improved my technical skills. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)

### B. Instructor Questions

- Faculty instruction supported the learning goals of this course. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- The instructor was passionate about student learning of the content. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- The instructor prepares for class. (scale 1-5, Agreement)

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- The pace of the class allows time to take notes. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- The pace of the class allows time to ask questions. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- I would recommend this course with this instructor. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- This instructor motivated me to do my best work. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- Instructor feedback such as grades, discussion, comments, etc. helped me to understand my progress in the course. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- Instructor feedback such as grades, discussion, comments, etc. was given in a timely fashion. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- The instructor treated me respectfully. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)
- The instructor challenged me to think critically about issues relevant to the discipline. (Scale 1-5, Agreement)

## Appendix C: Top Ten Suggestions to Increase Response Rates



### Top Ten Ways to Increase Course Evaluation Response

- 1** Explain how you personally use student feedback. Explain the importance of student feedback in how you approach course design, assignments, readings, etc., and give specific examples of changes you have made based on feedback.
- 2** Tie course evaluation questions directly to some specific assignments, strategies, or approaches in your class on which you want feedback.
- 3** Run through the questions with your students in class and explain how they relate to your class, including any questions you have added specifically for your course.
- 4** Use class time to have students complete the course evaluation. Set aside the first 10 to 15 minutes and have students bring in a mobile device. Display the response rate and leave the room. When you return, refresh the response rate and show the class the increase. Meanwhile, you can be checking the response rates while waiting for the class to complete the course evaluation.
- 5** Show or mention the response rates at the beginning of every class and encourage your students to complete the course evaluation.
- 6** Mention that the invitation & reminder emails will come from [institutional.research@eku.edu](mailto:institutional.research@eku.edu). Links are also available through Blackboard on the menu on the left side of the course home page.
- 7** Provide an incentive to your students to complete the course evaluation. For example, if the class reaches a predetermined target response rate, then there will be a helpful hint about the final, the study guide will be released early, or everyone will be assigned a few extra points.
- 8** Guide students about how to write helpful feedback on the open-ended questions.
- 9** Add “Complete the Course Evaluation” to your syllabus and list the dates the course evaluation is available for completion by adding the course evaluation as an ungraded problem or assignment.
- 10** Prime students to boost student participation—ask students if they intend to complete the course evaluations with a show of hands. Asking individuals about their intended behavior (e.g., voting, filling out surveys) can boost participation.

[Appendix D: University Level Report](#)  
(See Separate Attached Document)